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In order to facilitate such positioning, processes are known for the manufacture of mattress-like protecting elements comprising support elements which, in use, facilitate the handling thereof. Document EP0881334, in the name of Giuseppe Sarti & C., illustrates a process for the manufacture of a mattress-like flexible component comprising the stages of covering the chamber of a mould with a cover, positioning inside the chamber a reinforcement of wire netting lying in a plane parallel with the base of the chamber, introducing into the chamber a filling material, which is premixed at high temperature and is composed of an aggregate having dimensions such as to pass through the meshes of the netting until the reinforcement is incorporated, and covering the filling material with the cover.

The object of the present invention is to provide a process for the manufacture of protecting elements of the mattress-like type in a rapid, efficient and economical manner which thus permits a high degree of saving in terms of installation costs and time.

A further object of the present invention is to optimise the stages of the process for the manufacture of a protecting element of the mattress-like type which is easy to handle and is adaptable to different conditions of use.

In order to achieve the objects indicated above, the present invention relates to a process for the manufacture of protecting elements of the mattress-like type, comprising the stages of providing containing means; providing a layer of flexible material and arranging it inside the containing means, with the peripheral edges of the flexible layer protruding from the containing means; arranging anchoring means and a first netting structure inside the containing means, the netting structure being in direct contact with the flexible layer and the anchoring means passing through the netting structure at predetermined positions; filling the containing means with a filling material comprising solid and/or fluid elements; superposing a second netting structure on the filling material, and superposing, at least partially, the peripheral edges of the flexible layer in such a manner as to produce a closed cover from which the ends of the anchoring means protrude.

One of the main advantages of the present invention is that it provides a process for the manufacture of protecting elements of the mattress-like type, which, by reducing the number of stages necessary compared with the known processes, is rapid and efficient and, at the same time, preserves unchanged all of the characteristics of solidity and

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Naturally, the anchoring means 5 can be produced in various different forms, as long as the objects and advan-

When that preparation stage has been completed, a netting structure 6 is arranged in the mould 2 in such a manner that it is in direct contact with the fabric 3. The structure 6 is produced from double-twist wire netting having hexagonal meshes. In one embodiment of the present invention, the base comprises a panel of wire netting, the hexagonal meshes of which are preferably oriented in such a manner that the portions at the location of which the various wires are twisted with one another extend in the longi-

Finally, the hexagonal meshes of the wire netting of the base of the structure 6 are of a size such as to permit the complete passage of the cylindrical element 10 of the anchoring means 5, and thus to enable the netting structure 6 to adhere to the fabric 3, so that, as illustrated in Figure 11, the plate 9 is compressed between the fabric 3 and the base of the netting structure 6.

The ratio between the amount of solid material and the amount of mastic poured in is advantageously to be such that

The filling material 7 is poured into the mould 2 until its level reaches approximately the height of the lateral walls of the mould 2, but leaving the upper ends of the cylindrical elements 10 emerging at least partially and avoiding the formation of residual cavities by spreading and levelling operations.

Before the filling material 7 reaches its setting point, the mould 2 is covered with a further netting structure 8 in order to ensure continuity of form and material with the first netting structure 6, and to constitute a carrying structure for the mattress-like element. Given the chemical and physical characteristics of the filling material, once cooled, it will constitute a natural securing element between the two netting structures 6 and 8. Of course, the further netting structure 8 also is preferably produced from double-twist wire netting having hexagonal meshes of a size such as to permit the passage of the cylindrical element 10 of the anchoring means 5.

Finally, the peripheral edges 4 of the layer of fabric 3, which have remained outside the mould 2 during the first stages of the process, are lifted and secured to one another in such a manner as to close the entire layer of fabric 3 on itself and to produce the mattress-like protecting element.

The peripheral edges 4 are to permit, by means of openings which are predefined or formed during the manufacture of the mattress-like element, the emergence of the upper

According to a further process for the manufacture of a protecting element of the mattress-like type according to a further embodiment of the present invention, as illustrated in Figures 13 to 20, containing means, for example, although this is not to constitute a limitation, a preferably parallelepipedal mould 20 which has a rectangular base and which is generally produced from a rigid heat-resistant material are first of all provided. A layer of fabric 21 is positioned inside the mould 20, the fabric being constituted, for example, by a so-called "non-woven fabric", which therefore covers the inner portion of the mould. The surface extent of the fabric 21 is larger than the inner surface of the mould 20 so that peripheral edges 22 of the fabric 21 protrude from the mould.



A netting structure 23 is then arranged inside the mould 20 in such a manner that it is in direct contact with the fabric 21. The structure 23 is produced from double-twist wire netting having hexagonal meshes. In one embodiment of the present invention, the base comprises a panel of wire netting, the hexagonal meshes of which are preferably oriented in such a manner that the portions at the location of which the various wires are twisted with one another extend in the longitudinal direction of the netting structure 23. That characteristic is intended to promote the flexibility of the protecting element when it is superposed on a tubular pipe to be protected and immobilised, although it is not to be regarded as limiting.

The longitudinal surface extent of the netting structure 23 is larger than the inner surface of the mould 20, so that the peripheral edges 24 of the netting structure 23 are bent in accordance with a line 25 and protrude from the mould 2.

Anchoring means are then arranged at the location of the bending lines 25 on the inner surface of the netting structure 23 contained inside the mould 20. Figure 15 illustrates an embodiment, purely by way of non-limiting example, of an anchoring means comprising a rod 26 to which a plurality of straps 27, for example of fibres or the like, are secured. Naturally, the anchoring means may be produced in various different forms, as long as the objects and advantages of the present invention are achieved.

Finally, the hexagonal meshes of the peripheral edges 24 of the wire netting of the netting structure 23 are of a size such as to permit the complete passage of the straps 27, as illustrated in Figure 15.

According to this process, the mould 20 is then filled with a filling material 7 of known type, comprising, for ex-

Before the filling material 7 reaches its setting point, the peripheral edges 24 of the netting structure 23, which have remained outside the mould 20 during the first stages of the process, are bent towards the upper surface of the filling material 7 which, in turn, is covered by a further netting structure 8, in order to ensure continuity of form and material with the first netting structure 23, and to constitute a carrying structure for the mattress-like element. Given the chemical and physical characteristics of the filling material, once cooled, it will constitute a natural securing element between the two netting structures 23 and 8 and the peripheral edges 24. Naturally, the further netting

In a further, alternative, embodiment of the present invention, the peripheral edges 24 of the netting structure 23 are bent towards the base of the netting structure 23 before starting the stage of filling the mould 20, thus ensuring that the anchoring means have greater stability inside the netting structure 23.

The peripheral edges 22 are to permit, by means of openings which are predefined or produced during the manufacture of the mattress-like element, the emergence of the straps 27 in order to render them accessible to any handling means (not illustrated) and thus to facilitate the moving and handling of the mattress-like protecting element.

Naturally, the principle of the invention remaining the same, the forms of embodiment and details of manufacture may be varied widely with respect to those defined in the claims which follow, without thereby departing from the scope of the present invention.